

who resigned recently as chief fire investigator after twenty-seven years of service with the State. I know all of you join with me in an expression of gratitude to him for the loyal service he has rendered the State and wishing him the happiness he so richly deserves in his retirement. The Fire Marshal tells me that Benjamin Benson, III, the assistant chief is now working in that capacity and is doing an excellent job.

For all our concern with the many difficult problems of fire safety in the State, there are many encouraging signs. For example, a few months ago I had the pleasure of presenting the awards which the National Fire Protection Association made to our Maryland fire departments for the excellence of their performances. For the second successive year, the Fire Department of Baltimore City received highest honors in the judging of the national association. It was tied with Philadelphia for top honors among cities of its population class in 1965. The year before — in 1964 — it was first in the field. I also had the pleasure of presenting certificates of merit to the departments of Takoma Park, Silver Spring, Woodland Beach, Bowleys Quarters, Laurel, Bladensburg, Potomac Heights and West Lanham Hills. Awards were given also to the fire protection bureaus of Anne Arundel, Montgomery and Prince Georges counties.

I have been greatly encouraged, too, with the success which has been attained by the Governor's Fire Prevention Conferences, which were inaugurated during the first year of my tenure of office. Since 1959, there has been a steady growth of the attendance of these important conferences on fire prevention. Last year 331 persons attended the meeting, the largest attendance up to that time. The conference this year will be held November 29 and 30 in Annapolis. I hope that many of you will be present at this year's conference and that all of you will give it your support.

With all the evidence of progress that we see about us, however, it is unlikely that the tasks of fire safety will grow less. On the contrary, we have witnessed for the past several years discouraging increases in fire casualties and property loss. Last year, I am advised, there were 155 persons who lost their lives in fires in our State. Thirty of these, it is shameful to admit, were children unattended by their parents or others. It is saddening to all of us to read in our newspapers of the deaths of men, women and children in fires which could have been, and should have been, prevented. Less of a tragedy undoubtedly, but disappointing nevertheless, are the property losses occurring in fires. How sad it was a few days ago, for example, to